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MFA FINAL VISUAL PRESENTATION

BY

PAUL DAVID FREEMAN

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH IN
PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF FINE ARTS


IN

DRAWING

DEPARTMENT OF ART AND DESIGN

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

FALL 2005



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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of
Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled:

Final Visual Presentation

Submitted by Paul David Freeman in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Fine Arts.

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

RELEASE FORM

NAME OF AUTHOR: PAUL DAVID FREEMAN

TITLE OF THESIS: FINAL VISUAL PRESENTATION

DEGREE FOR WHICH THESIS WAS GRANTED: MASTER OF FINE ARTS

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This Hurts Me More Than It Hurts You:

This work is deliberately distressing and can be difficult to look at; I am responsible for doing this to you. While I understand that for the viewer the initial contact with the work is more likely to be unsettling or even disturbing rather than pleasant, I encourage you to use this unease – as well as any fascination or curiosity that you might also feel at this moment – to good use. Let's take this confrontation with unreal and uncomfortable combinations of plant, animal and human forms as an opportunity to feel the weight of those things we are reluctant to address individually and collectively.

There are parallel streams running through the work. There is the disruption of our sense of self, of our initial wholeness, that happens through the deliberate or unintentional traumas we inflict on each other. There is also a representation of the planned and accidental disturbances of the natural world, like the genetic intervention or environmental pollution affecting our food, our ecologies, our children and their futures. The alteration of garden sculpture (mass produced for easy consumption) makes these generally invisible and insidious perversions physical and obvious. The material, personal, emotional, and spiritual boundaries that have been violated in us or that we have broken in others, are not really separate phenomena from the disruption of genetic barriers, the extermination of whole species or the economic exploitation of people all over the world. These traumas are reflections of each other.

Can we continue to live in the same way if we accept the broader consequences of convenience, comfort and privilege? Are we willing to accept the challenge of loving each other unconditionally? Like this kind of artwork these kinds of questions aren't easy to look at.

Paul Freeman



CHRIS SCHWARZ, THE JOURNAL

Paul Freeman surrounds himself with several of the twisted images in his current show.

Highbrow meets the high wire

MFA show has designs on creating a freak-show atmosphere

Artist Paul Freeman's feelings won't be hurt if you find his upcoming FAB Gallery show more than a little freaky.

In fact, Freeman would be a bit disappointed if you didn't find his show — *This Will Hurt Me More Than it Hurts You* — on the creepy and strange side. His MFA-Drawing Graduation Exhibit is specifically designed to be slightly twisted and evoke a circus sideshow vibe with its eerie drawings of half-rendered, half-decayed animals and uncanny statues of mutated animals and people.

"It is meant to remind the viewer of the freak show, the carnival, the circus," he says.

"I've even designed a series of 12 posters (featuring images of creepy statues culled from the show) in these bright colours that has that 'the circus is coming to town' attitude. This way even if people don't come to the gallery, I'll have brought a part of the show to them by taking these images to the street."

Freeman says he's always embraced "the high-low thing" and enjoys "raising the low up high and bringing the high down low" in his fine art projects. To that end, the small, heavily manipulated sculptures in the show are based on common lawn ornaments the artist buys at big box home and hardware stores.

"Artists need to talk to the people and you can't do that if all you are doing is reaching back into art history. I want to talk to people around me and the best way to do that is to use a (pop-culture)

Gilbert Bouchard



PREVIEW

Paul Freeman's *This Will Hurt Me More Than it Hurts You*

Showing at: FAB Gallery, 1-1 Fine Arts Building, U of A Campus, 112th Street and 89th Avenue

From: Oct. 25 to Nov. 5. Meet the artist at the opening reception, Thursday, Oct. 27, from 7 to 10 p.m.

visual vocabulary people understand," he says.

"I'm not afraid of using found objects and respond to what is given to me because I believe that you can be more original by stealing. It forces you to make decisions that you normally would not make to force the work to be your own."

One of the larger intellectual goals of the show is to explore the various ways in which the world is being subtly subverted by "Frankenstein science" like genetically modified foods where genes from other species are inserted into the

DNA of domestic plants and animals, says Freeman. For example, in the mid-90s Pioneer Hi-Bred International Inc. of Des Moines, Iowa, manipulated a soybean with a gene from Brazil nuts in an attempt to increase the plant's nutritional value, a product that was never released because it caused reactions in people with Brazil nut allergies.

"I'm taking that idea (swapping genes between species) and turning it inside out," he says.

Two series of animal and human figures in the show have had their original heads lopped off and replaced with new heads created from moulds he's made from actual fruit and vegetables. The alien-plant heads on the human figures are painted in flesh-tone which makes the hybrid shapes even more disturbing.

"Some of these pieces have a strange sexuality and underline that tension that exists when the barrier between species is dropped. I'm really asking people to think about what they are feeding their children with these pieces riffing off the idea that 'you are what you eat' in a very literal fashion," he says.

Freeman, 36, cites "the weird and painful hybrid images" of Mexican artist Frida Kahlo as one of his highbrow inspirations.

"Like it or not we're all living in the Pepsi compound and you have all these huge food companies like Monsanto trying to control the whole food chain."

PAUL FREEMAN,
This Will Hurt Me More Than
it Hurts You, FAB Gallery,
until Nov. 5, 492-208

Veggie-headed mutants artistic labour of love

Paul Freeman has, for the last two years or so, been working on a master of fine arts in drawing and intermedia at the University of Alberta. But after catching a couple of digital media and sculpture shows, this is the first time that I've seen him show a series of actual drawings.

"I was interested in now showing any drawings, as a contrary gesture! No. Because I'm teaching drawing, I felt like I needed to be doing it so I could speak of it with confidence and a measure of authority. I just started making myself draw but with no agenda for the exhibition itself. But they worked out so well, I'm so happy with them."

In the end, his MFA show consists of a few drawings and dozens of sculptures, made from modified garden statuary found at the grocery and hardware stores.

"They (the drawings) manage to do the thing that I find makes my work successful. They draw you in with some real, luxurious material beauty, but then repel at the same time. You can move back and forth. The drawings are almost a topographical experience, and the way the marks are laid down on the paper, I wanted a measure of craftsmanship that you could appreciate on an esthetic level, but then you have to grapple with, yeah, what is that? Some people think that's some kind of deformed monster."

His drawings are anatomically accurate representations of a pig in different stages of pregnancy, a cow giving birth and a sow with ghostly faces where her nipples should be. Is

fragmentation and disjunctures that are so much a part of social life and the thing that our culture does to plants and animals in the world?"

While he has made such sculptures before, this is the first time he has devoted most of his energy into the figures themselves, rather than using them in his digital prints.

"I started limiting myself with no more digital and did this series of works, the fruit-headed guys. I made moulds of various fruits and cast them and attached them and threw on this portrait-tone colour, and they instantly transformed into gonads and other things!"

Next, he grafted even more elaborate fruit and vegetable heads onto animals, and then plant or fungal growths onto playing children.

"This looks gross, but the moulds are worse, they look very *Naked Lunch*-y. Part of this was to push the limits of the material and the casting, but to move even further into some sort of distorted sexual organ dialogue, and to incorporate that dialogue into family relationships."

It's no surprise that the works of David Cronenberg, Canada's cyber-biological gross-out king, pop up in conversation. There is a definite element of *The Fly* in these sculptures, but like *Fly* or the twin doctors in *Dead Ringers*, he loves his mutants. They're special.

"I love these. They are so beautiful! Hours and hours of painting," Freeman says, admiring the delicately coloured veggie-headed chickens and bears.

"It's much more of a challenge to push past all that. It's important, when we look at these issues, it all comes down to can we love each other in spite of our difference, in spite of our problems? Everybody's going to react, 'That's so sick,' but ultimately I hope we can get to the point where we can care about these things."

Paul Freeman

SUPPLIED

that a hint of the Pickton farm slayings in B.C.?

"I didn't think of that! Gross! To me, it's about 'pharms' and GMOs. But then there's a whole other level, especially with the sculptures. There are two streams: What are we doing to food, what are we doing to children? What are we doing with science, with consumption? Very material stuff. And then there's the emotional or spiritual elements which are much more about the relationship between parent and children, how those scars and effects can be represented physically, but also refers to that lesion or impressions of experience."

"The fact that we have in the last 20, 30 years, broken down barriers between genders, species — what are the implications of that? Is there a relationship between the

THIS HURTS ME MORE THAN IT HURTS YOU

By Paul Freeman, Through Nov 5, Opening Reception Thu, Oct 27, 7-10 pm, FAB Gallery (Fine Arts Bldg, U of A Campus, 89 Ave & 112 St), Info: 492-2081

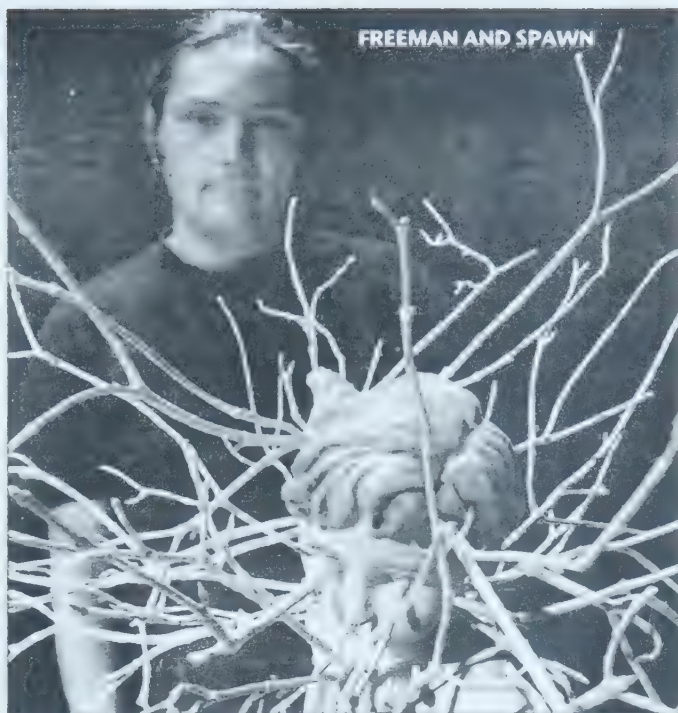
SOME POOR SUCKER OF A RODENT IS splayed out in the "Is it dead or just weird?" repose of anatomy studies, rendered huge on paper in a dense carnival of short pastel strokes. In this three-dimensional world, a meandering length of organ-evoking tube (trachea? colon? who knows?) joins a pair of squirrel bodies. Children and animals have heads replaced with fruits and flowers that have been robbed of their native colouring and are instead disturbingly fleshy. Another set of kids has been arrested mid-play by strange plagues that sinisterly turn benign organic expressions into terrifying disabilities.

Quite literally "bodies" of work, the drawings and sculptures that comprise Paul Freeman's MFA thesis exhibition are undeniably disquieting. The unnerving effect is a conspiracy between the questions posed by the pieces and the level of mastery in aesthetic execution, animated by Freeman's comprehensive and original overarching vision.

Whether you react with revulsion, bewilderment, or a whistling-in-the-graveyard chuckle at his grotesques, it would be nearly impossible not to respond. The pathos summoned by Freeman's biological manipulations call to attention both the inevitable decline of our frail physicality as well as our clumsy human attempts to control other living things.

"There are two streams running through these," acknowledges Freeman. "There's the very material: mortality, decay, the body, planned or accidental interference with the body through medical interference, genetic modification, pollution, the exploitation of animals... Then there is also the lived emotional experience. Things are not always pleasant in our relationship with the physical world."

Especially not if you are an innocent lawn ornament, perched amidst dozens of others at Home Depot, before being whisked off to Freeman's studio to endure his artis-



Trauma centre

Paul Freeman shows that the flesh is weak

tic attentions.

"I appropriated kitschy garden sculpture, with the fake copper patina, and I 'intervened' with it," laughs Freeman. "After a while I had to set a limit—no more beheading."

Using a "mish-mash of materials," Freeman realized the re-purposed fauna and kids in painstaking detail. The colours and forms he added to the sculptures are close to flawless. "I had to push out of the kitschy thing, and that attention to craft is kind of a cue to allow yourself to get into the aesthetic," he explains.

"It was important to me not to look exploitative or trite. It goes back to what I learned as a jeweler. There are definite standards here."

While Freeman drew on his earlier art education and practice, he also tried to free himself from some aspects of his prior experience, such as a preference for using a camera

and computer tools and for saturating images with colour. Inspired by an artist who deliberately chose to avoid working with materials and methods he enjoyed, Freeman challenged himself to similarly create an art practice that was not fuelled by what was easy and attractive to him.

One aspect of his practice Freeman chose not to subvert was his insistence on putting his art directly in the path of the public. He contends that the 12 posters he created for the exhibition, are also a part of the show. "I'm hoping they'll get stolen," he adds.

He also mentions his original inclination was to create a surreal environment for the sculptures in the gallery, rather than the simplicity of the department store-type setup he went with. "I was thinking about Astroturf, fountains, really over the top stuff," he smiles. "But, I thought, 'No, they don't need the help.'"

CHRISTA O'KEEFE

ExpressNews

November 6, 2005

FAB exhibit seduces and disturbs

by Geoff McMaster

November 3, 2005 - Paul Freeman sees his work as "presenting the uncomfortable, but in a really beautiful way."

His exhibit at the University of Alberta's Fine Arts Building Gallery, *This Will Hurt Me More Than it Does You*, is undeniably disturbing, with twisted, distorted figures evoking the scars of abuse, sexual and otherwise.

But Freeman hopes the show elicits a response more complex than simple repulsion, that the viewer will also be "seduced by colour and form and texture and literally the hard work of it all...then repelled by some of the content, and then drawn back in again." After all, that mixed bag of emotions lies at the heart of much psychological and spiritual injury. Freeman calls it an "inside-out approach, to make all those internal, possibly invisible effects grotesquely manifest on the exterior of the form."

The scar tissue here is deep and multi-layered, however. In addition to externalizing internal personal pain is the commentary on societal disease and the sometimes discomfiting intrusions of science.

"There's a very material set of thoughts about environmental degradation and pollution," he says of the show, his final presentation for a master's degree in drawing and intermedia. It deals with the "scientific violation of the barriers between plant and animal, pushing through the cell wall with new genetic material."

In one suite of sculptures, for example, a group of five children is inflicted with a "plant-based infection," covered in fungus, barnacles, dead branches - all of it expressing some form of internal damage, or "what happens when as a child you're confronted with bad behaviour, and how you internalize it," says Freeman.

But on another level, he adds, the plant-like growths also illustrate the questionable role of genetic engineering in fusing species.

The sculpture form is a departure for Freeman, a mature artist who felt his previous approach to art was becoming a bit stale and predictable. He had worked for years in digital media, using scanners, cameras and photocopiers to manipulate images. In his road kill series, for instance, he would put "dead animals onto the photocopier or scanner, making gigantic murals."

His new method began by chopping off the heads of sculpted figures and replacing them with an orange, a pear - anything that might suggest the right kind of meaningful mutation. The series took off from there.

Dealing with raw, emotional content is hardly new to Freeman. Neither is the concept of approaching art with fresh eyes. He has been working for years with people who have developmental disabilities, showing them the liberating power of art. For the past 2-1/2 years he has been lead artist at the Nina Haggerty Centre for the Arts, an inner-city art studio devoted to helping the developmentally disabled explore their artistic potential.

It is perhaps the Nina Haggerty vision that now shapes Freeman more than anything else. And although he'd like to take his show beyond city limits - even to an international audience - he's committed to the centre for the long haul.

"My agenda has always been that art comes second, or even last. The most important thing to do is create an environment where people feel accepted, empowered, free to do what they want - and then challenge them."

Freeman's exhibit in FAB runs until Nov. 5.



Address of this ExpressNews article:

<http://www.expressnews.ualberta.ca/article.cfm?id=7079>



Behind closed doors

Paul Freeman's *This Hurts Me More Than it Hurts You* is a searing exploration of childhood sexual abuse

BY AGNIESZKA MATEJKO

Like many artists, I used to sneer at the idea of art as a pretty object to hang above the couch. But, to tell the truth, I now see some wisdom in it—most of us don't want, or need, to face issues of hunger or prostitution as we are wind down after a hard day. Besides, such art sometimes perpetuates problems or, even worse, exploits them. Artists who rip open the evils of the world often seem more bent on grabbing attention than on thoughtfully representing the ills of society. But genuine exploration of suffering, like Paul Freeman's show *This Hurts Me More Than it Hurts You*, has a place. It may be excruciating, painful and leave us feeling weak in the knees, but it's also meaningful, and we need to examine the underbelly of our polite, cultured and privacy-obsessed society. And Freeman's art does just that, with an unflinching, heartfelt honesty that's so searing his work could use an "Enter at Your Own Emotional Risk" sign placed at the entrance of the gallery.

In his art, Freeman externalizes the unspeakable emotional lesions and scars that all too many children carry into adulthood. "I think that

there is an understandable desire to keep these things hidden, and I don't think that we should talk about them all the time," explains Freeman. But neither is he willing to let harsh realities out of sight and out of mind altogether. "It's my nature to push when I don't think things are right," he says. His art fearlessly faces the most tragic of childhood scars—the sexual abuse of children. What happens to those children? What do they go through? What do they feel? These are some of the questions that Freeman's art answers with depth and breadth born of personal experience. "[My work] manifests what can happen when a person has been afraid in that way," he says. "You are marked by it forever."

TO HELP US APPROACH this "untouchable" subject, Freeman

chose subtle symbolic language; there's nothing offensive here, as he shows no explicit images of abuse. In fact, as we enter the gallery we are surrounded with familiar figurines, the kind kids gaze at from behind the glass cabinet in grandma's house, and the gallery is full of them. There are little girls in colourful skirts holding baskets, fluffy dogs, graceful swans and leaping porpoises. Only there is an eerie twist: parts of the statuettes have been altered. You begin to wonder if their heads have been replaced with strange wounds or genitalia, and soon realize that the heads are nothing more sinister than skin-coloured fruit. In another room of similar figurines, the pink glow of children's cheeks has been replaced by lesions that spread like an infection, like

some horrible disease. But you look again and the lesions are merely growing roots, forest fungi and branches.

Freeman's grotesque juxtaposition of delightful childhood objects is much more powerful than any explicit portrayal. The artist leaves the viewers alone with these eerie figurines—all we have to rely on is our own gory imagination. We begin to feel as if we have just entered a room where the unspeakable happens behind closed doors, yet we see nothing, hear nothing. It's just in our heads. And like the abused children, we are at a loss for words. "There are no words for this," explains Freeman. All that can be shared is the raw feeling of the experience.

The defensive reaction, though, is wondering if we should subject ourselves to this rawness willingly, wondering if there's a real social benefit to art like Freeman's. "This is what I have to share," he says. "This is what I had to get out for other people who need some of this. You run into it. They are out there. They (sexually abused children) make up a big part of the population. In the North it is 85 per cent of people."

"We have to ask about what's happening," he adds with conviction. "We can't just be saying 'This is too difficult.' We have a vested interest in other people's happiness." ●

THIS HURTS ME MORE THAN IT HURTS YOU

By Paul Freeman • FAB Gallery (U of A Fine Arts Building Gallery) • Oct 25-Nov 5

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October 25, 2005 — November 5, 2005

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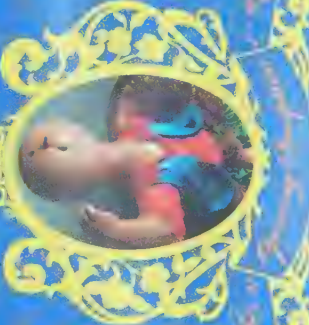
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Paul Freeman MFA Thesis: List of works:

- 1) **The Processor**
146 x 153 cm - 2005
soft pastel on paper
- 2) **Fresh**
153 x 103 cm - 2005
soft pastel on paper
- 3) **Fecund**
153 x 153 cm - 2005
soft pastel on paper
- 4) **Fulfilled**
153 x 114 cm - 2005
soft pastel on paper
- 5) **Strain**
153 x 141 cm - 2005
soft pastel on paper
- 6) **Farrow**
153 x 153 cm - 2005
soft pastel on paper
- 7) **Miriliton**
63 x 22 x 23 cm - 2005
mixed media
- 8) **Patatom**
39 x 36 x 17 cm - 2005
mixed media
- 9) **Pira**
38 x 18 x 38 cm - 2005
mixed media
- 10) **Piper**
48 x 19 x 22 cm - 2005
mixed media
- 11) **Appelo**
51 x 17 x 17 cm - 2005
mixed media
- 12) **Limona**
45 x 17 x 20 cm - 2005
mixed media
- 13) **Persimma**
53 x 16 x 16 cm - 2005
mixed media
- 14) **Ursus Naranj**
46 x 16 x 21 cm - 2005
mixed media
- 15) **Ursus Vulgaris**
36 x 33 x 28 cm - 2005
mixed media
- 16) **Pullus Fresa**
36 x 33 x 28 cm - 2005
mixed media
- 17) **Cervus Tuberosus**
24 x 33 x 17 cm - 2005
mixed media
- 18) **Cygnus Cloacas**
26 x 26 x 50 cm - 2005
mixed media
- 19) **Anas Vulgaris**
48 x 25 x 25 cm - 2005
mixed media
- 20) **Germinal**
50 x 30 x 18 cm - 2005
mixed media
- 21) **Carbuncula**
57 x 32 x 22 cm - 2005
mixed media
- 22) **Stipes**
76 x 63 x 60 cm - 2005
mixed media

- 23) **Fungella**
46 x 24 x 18 cm - 2005
mixed media
- 24) **Pustulo**
40 x 26 x 13 cm - 2005
mixed media
- 25) **Sciurus Intension**
75 x 32 x 35 cm - 2005
mixed media
- 26) **Counterporpoise**
86 x 46 x 65 cm - 2005
mixed media
- 27) **Equitable Friends**
75 x 38 x 43 cm - 2005
mixed media
- 28) **Welcome**
50 x 40 x 53 cm - 2005
mixed media
- 29) **This Hurts Me More Than It Hurts You** - installation view
FAB Gallery University of Alberta
- 30) **This Hurts Me More Than It Hurts You - Rites & Passages Suite** - installation view
FAB Gallery University of Alberta
- 31) **This Hurts Me More Than It Hurts You – Transformations Suite** - installation view
FAB Gallery University of Alberta
- 32) **This Hurts Me More Than It Hurts You - Contaminations Suite** - installation view
FAB Gallery University of Alberta
- 33) **This Hurts Me More Than It Hurts You - Contaminations Suite** - installation view
FAB Gallery University of Alberta
- 34) **This Hurts Me More Than It Hurts You - Connections Suite** - installation view
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